

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Progress On Clean Air Still Falls Short of Properly Protecting Public Health

We have made substantial progress as a nation in reducing air pollution over the last three decades, but half of all Americans still live in places with unhealthy levels of air pollution which has a tremendous impact on public health, contributing to asthma attacks, lung cancer, heart disease, and tens of thousands of premature deaths each year. While today's vehicles are as much as 90 percent cleaner than those of the 1960s, cars and trucks emit a large portion of smog-causing pollutants and will remain the leading source of air pollution for years to come in many metro areas because Americans are driving more and more. Peer reviewed scientific research provides compelling evidence that air pollution from highways cause "adverse effects" to public health, costing Americans more than \$40 billion each year. Conformity is an important tool for controlling emissions of the pollutants that contribute to these effects.

Transportation conformity under the Clean Air Act helps keep unanticipated growth in traffic and pollution from motor vehicles from causing regional air pollution control strategies to fail, as happened repeatedly in the past. Conformity has spurred broader political support for cleaner vehicles, fuels, and maintenance, and strategies to curb traffic and pollution growth with better travel choices. Conformity finally got transportation and air quality agencies to talk to one other and coordinate to cut pollution.

Proposed Changes to Conformity Would Weaken Protections for Public Health

Proposed changes to conformity threaten to undo this progress and to substantially weaken a key tool designed to help state and local air pollution officials manage vehicle emissions on a long-term basis. The result will be that air quality will deteriorate and there will be fewer options for eliminating air pollution. In the end, not only will the health of our citizens suffer, but other sources, at perhaps greater cost, may be forced to implement emissions reductions that proper transportation planning could have avoided.

We urge you not to upset the existing clean air and public health protections built into our transportation programs. Both the House and Senate bills include provisions that weaken these protections, in some cases dramatically. In most cases, the House provisions, which are the same as in this year's H.R. 3, are less damaging to clean air protections. The most preferable and protective action Congress can take is to reaffirm the existing law with no changes. But adoption of the H.R. 3 provisions would be preferable to the House taking no position on this vital matter as the transportation bill goes to conference. We also urge you to reject any efforts to add new provisions to weaken clean air protections during conference negotiations.

Conformity has fallen short in achieving one of its original goals as framed in the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments, to encourage efforts by local, regional, and state officials to design transportation plans that would contribute to more timely attainment of healthful air quality. But some regions have made progress towards this end and are finding ways to reduce pollution at no cost at all through better community designs that respond to citizen and market demands and minimize traffic growth while maximizing travel choices. Vision planning initiatives and conformity planning in Salt Lake City, Sacramento, Denver and Charlotte have recently built on the early success of Portland, Oregon, in helping citizens and elected officials define new regional plans that accommodate new job and housing growth with less traffic growth.